

MUSICAL AND SIGNALING INSTRUMENTS

The music is chiefly instrumental; vocal music is seldom heard, 533 ●
and is chiefly performed by the sukya in practicing his incantations.

DRUM.—Our common drum, known by its English name (M.: 534
drum; S.: *durum*), is the favorite musical instrument among the men;
it has been extremely popular ever since its introduction by British
garrisons during the eighteenth century. The Indians make it
themselves and beat it at their drinking bouts with the aid of the
wooden drumsticks (M.: *mihta*; S.: *tifisi*).

The horizontal hollowed-out log drum with an H-shaped cutting
made longitudinally (the *teponatektli* of the Mexicans and the *tunkul*
of the Maya), which is used for signaling purposes in different parts of
America and Melanesia, appears to have been unknown in the region
under consideration. The common drum is sometimes used to advise [202]
the neighbors of a miala feast.⁴

The upright native drum (M.: *kuabi*, *kuabaya*; S.: *panian*, *pana-
tak*) is goblet shaped and hollowed out from a solid block of mahogany
or cedar; it has a height of about 3 feet at least, including the pedestal
base, which is carved from the same block of wood. The smallest
diameter is at the bottom just above the pedestal support. The
drumhead at the top is formed by a piece of animal skin (deer, toad,
iguana, or tapir); it is held taut by means of a strong rope which is
attached to the pendent edges of the skin and firmly tied to the shell
of the drum. It is beaten with the hand and used only at the festival
of the dead. This instrument corresponds to the *kuchueli* of the
ancient Mexicans.

RATTLES.—Round or egg-shaped gourd rattles, the common play-
things of our babies, figure among the musical instruments of the
Mosquito Coast, and are found in use all over the New World. They
are handled chiefly by the women, particularly at the festivals of the
dead, in order to mark the measure at the dances. These rattles are
made from the fruits of the calabash tree, from which the pulpy
contents have been removed through a circular opening at the stem;
small stones, pebbles, hard seeds, or beans are then introduced.
Finally, a close-fitting stick, which acts like a handle, is introduced;
it tapers somewhat toward the distal end, which is thrust entirely

⁴ The foreigners living on the Mosquito Coast jokingly use the phrase "bush
telegraph" to refer to the rapid way in which news sometimes travels, but there is
no such mysterious way used by the Indians. It is claimed that the Miskito
living on the savanna near the sea occasionally spread news by the signal of
making a savanna fire. But such a signal could not be very definite as these
fires are generally kindled for no purpose but to burn the grass and low thickets.
Sometimes men from villages far apart come within shouting distance of one
another when hunting. It is also claimed that some men have a "whistling
language," and are able to communicate any sentence correctly by whistling. [198]

hands of an Indian from the neighboring village of Cuje, who called it "quijongo" or "sambumbio." It was at least 5 feet in length and 1½ inches thick. A little from the center the string was tied back to the arc with the aid of another thread, so that two strings of unequal size were formed. This instrument could produce a great variety of tones. In Olancho (Honduras) I saw later a bow of equal size but with a calabash resonator; it was called "caramba" there. The gourd was fastened with the mouth downward at the convex surface of the arc, at the same point where the cross string had been attached to the wood, that is, about one-third the distance from one end. The Rama of Nicaragua also call this instrument *lufke*, while among the Lenca of Honduras it is known as *bumbum*; it is also found among the Kekchi of Guatemala, and was known to the Island Carib of the seventeenth century, according to De Poincy.

In spite of the fact that in Central America the musical bow is limited to the pure Indians, it is supposed to be, like all other stringed instruments, of foreign origin. The various names by which it is known in Central America savor of African origin. It is also found in certain regions of South America and has a wide distribution under different forms in large areas of Africa and Melanesia.

OTHER INSTRUMENTS.—Violins, guitars, accordions, and harmonicons may be found in certain regions; they are chiefly of German manufacture. Instead of beating the drum or shaking the rattle, the Miskito occasionally clap the hands together at the dances in order to obtain a rhythmic effect.

AMUSEMENTS: SONGS, DANCES, STORY-TELLING, GAMES, AND SPORTS

SONGS.—The Sumu rarely sing (M.: *siwanaye*; T., P.: *siwannin*, *siwannini*; U.: *unbūmaka*), but the Miskito sing occasionally when they are either sad or happy. All their songs are soft and plaintive, and they all sound alike to the stranger, who is unable to distinguish the gay songs from the sad ones, unless he has lived some time among the Indians. The *sukyās* of both tribes sing upon practicing their rites of incantation, but owing to their intermingling of many old and obscure phrases, these songs are unintelligible to the other Indians.

I was unable to collect any indigenous song, but Young, Fellechner, and Bell have been more fortunate than I. In these songs appear many phrases not used in general conversation. Fellechner (268) obtained a number of songs which were apparently composed in an antique form of the Miskito language, for the interpreters were unable to give the meaning of many parts of them. Most of this material has never been published. The following specimen is that

162

BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY

[BULL. 186]

Occasionally both sexes

765 perform very "lame" dances which they have apparently learned
535 from the foreigners. One dance, which does not lack a certain grace,
is performed by the young women, forming a half circle. They place
the left arm around the neck of their neighbor and perform slow
movements of the body to the rhythm of calabash rattles which they
hold in the right hand. Occasionally they utter a soft melancholy
song.

765 Several young men are continually playing reed flutes or flageolets
533 (bras), while others beat a skin membrane drum (kushi) with the palm
of the hand. Most of the "music" performed consists of conven-
tional imitations of the voice of animals or birds; the dancers accom-
pany it by imitating the gait or the actions of the particular animal
or bird.

765 Toward midnight two or three old men play on very long, stout
bamboo flutes, which produce such an unearthly noise as to really
scare a stranger. These instruments are said to be blown in order
to direct to the feast two or three masqueraded figures which are
supposed to come from the forest. As soon as the latter approach
the hut all the women run inside, for they are not supposed to see
them. The relatives of the deceased person immediately cover
their faces with a cloth and then begin to lament and cry, for the
masqueraded persons have some connection with the departed one.
They try to injure themselves by knocking the head against the
house posts, or by inflicting wounds on themselves with the aid of
arms, rocks, or other objects, but the guests intercede and prevent
them from harming themselves in a serious way. At a *sikro* on Rio
Plátano I was witness when an old woman made a deep cut in her
arm with the aid of an old, rusty machete. The maskers walk a few
times around the hut, but after having been engaged in conversation
by the *sukya* they return to the bush whence they had come. In
order to induce them to depart some of the men make a strange
noise on a flute (*yul*) made from the *kliant* reed and having some
beeswax applied to the mouthpiece. As soon as they have left the
women dry their tears, and they are again as happy as before, for
they know now that their deceased relative will within a short
time arrive safely at the land of hereafter.

The head and shoulder piece of the masquerade dress is made of
a piece of tanned skin or of the inner bark of certain trees; it is
painted red and black. Holes are made in the part covering the
face to correspond to the wearer's eyes. Dry grass is used to sim-
ulate hair, while a crinolinelike fringe of palm leaves depends from
the shoulder piece, so that nothing but the legs of the wearer are
visible. The headpiece is surmounted by an upright bar of light
wood with the likeness (*bilks*) of a certain animal or object. All

§[At the festival of the dead - Analyst]

is an elaboration of aboriginal customs, encouraged by the English. Early 721 records indicate that the *Sumo*, *Paya*, and *Jicaque* developed similar but perhaps less complicated organizations in order to resist the Spanish Conquest. Probably they too had waged war previous to the 16th century, but available data do not permit identification of aboriginal customs.

Among the *Mosquito* and *Sumo* all men were potential warriors. They 714 were arranged according to military ranks, which were distinguished by feather insignia. The warriors, particularly of the *Sumo*, were subject to severe tests including dietary restrictions, and they celebrated various ceremonies. Women were not permitted to attend these ceremonies, and the warriors were not supposed to have any relations with women. Before a battle shamans were consulted. The warriors, painted black, usually 726 attacked the enemy at night. The *Mosquito* took prisoners to be sold as slaves to the Whites. The *Sumo* killed as many of the enemy as possible. They mutilated the corpses and wore the teeth and fingernails as trophies. 727 Some of the *Sumo* reputedly ate the roasted flesh of their enemies in order 724 to inflict further insult upon them and to make sure that they were completely destroyed.

ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Dances and music.—All ceremonies are the time for much intoxica- 533 tion, dancing, and singing. On frequent occasions the *Mosquito* sing in 723 groups or singly. There are many kinds of dances, some of them specially 535 for women and others for particular ceremonies. There are two types of 534 drums: a goblet-shaped drum used in funeral and memorial ceremonies and a drum of European origin which is used in some of the ceremonies and, perhaps, as a signal drum. Conch-shell trumpets and reed or bone flutes with one to four stops are blown. *Sumo* and *Mosquito* shamans use flutes 6 feet (2 m.) long. The musical bow, with or without a gourd sounding box, is played by women. Gourd rattles are also used.

RELIGION

The *Sumo*, *Mosquito*, and *Paya* believe in a deity, called "Our Father," 776 who lives in the sky. He is little interested in mankind, is too far removed 824 to be approached by humans, and has little influence upon human affairs. The sun, moon, and stars, especially the Pleiades, are considered to be supernatural beings. They figure in the mythology and are of some significance in the religious philosophy. Solar and lunar eclipses, thunder, wind, the rainbow, and other celestial phenomena are explained by myths. The last three are the agents of the major deities.

A *Sumo* creation myth recounts the activities of two brothers who made 773 the animals out of maize cobs. People are believed to have been made from rays of the sun. The *Paya* believe that their god sowed men in the